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ABSTRACT

The importance of out-of-role behavior in teacher evaluation was investigated. Sixty administrators were presented one of two variations of a teacher's application form from which they assessed the personality traits of the teacher and indicated their interest in interviewing the teacher. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) revealed that altering responses for out-of-role behavior (positive vs. negative) resulted in significantly lower trait-ratings and likelihood of an interview for the teacher with negative out-of-role behavior than for the teacher with positive out-of-role behavior. This finding is consistent with the theoretical expectations. The importance of this finding for administrative accountability is discussed. (Author)

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THE APPLICATION OF ATTRIBUTION THEORY TO EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION

Marion Rice

Accountability, which originally referred only to fiscal responsibility, is now used in reference to student achievement in cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, counseling, and more recently administrative performance (Nicholson, 1972).

Concerted efforts are being directed toward determining how administrators might be classified in the accountability spectrum, e.g., the trend toward more accountability in the evaluation and hiring of teachers.

The current application and evaluation forms for teachers give the impression that the whole process has become much more objective and has taken a large step forward in the area of accountability. However, as Lopez (1970) asserts, "Objective measures when examined closely, are usually found to be biased or unreliable (p.231)." If this is so, then a gap exists between appearance and reality. The application and evaluation forms give the impression of being mainly concerned with the teacher's school performance, i.e., in-role behavior; yet there is always at least a small section devoted to personal data or out-of-role behavior and one is inclined to wonder what effect this type of information has upon the total evaluation of the teacher. To what extent do administrators

rely upon out-of-role behavior in making their selections?

The influence of in-role and out-of-role behavior upon the perception and evaluation of an individual is addressed directly by attribution theory (Kelley, 1967). Attribution theory suggests that behaviors which conform to role requirements are seen as uninformative about the individual's personal qualities. Out-of-role behavior, which takes place in an environment of more perceived freedom, permits the attribution process to operate (Steiner, 1970). Thus, from the theory, it may be hypothesized that administrators are using information unrelated to job performance far more than they realize; particularly, when they do not know the teacher, e.g., when s/he is first applying for a position.

Hence, the purpose of the present study is to determine if administrators who have been presented teachers' application forms with negative responses for information of little importance to the job of teaching ,i.e., for preselected out-of-role behaviors respond lower in: (a) their evaluation of the teacher's personality traits and (b) their interest in seeing the teacher for a future interview than administrators who have been presented identical application forms except for a positive emphasis on the same out-of-role behaviors.

Method

Public school administrators, two groups of 30 subjects (Ss) each, were presented one of two variations of a teacher's

application form from which they were asked to: (a) assess personality-traits about the teacher, as represented by the application form, and (b) indicate their degree of interest in seeing the teacher for a future interview. The application forms were identical, except for responses to six categories. The six categories which were varied were those which had previously been rated by a group of administrators as only minimally or not at all related to effective teaching performance for an elementary school teacher. On one form, these were given positive responses; on the other, negative responses.

Attached to each application form was a standard questionnnaire. After reading the teacher's application, the S was asked to respond to the questionnaire which contained: (a) 40 Thurstonian scaled personality-trait words, from which the five which most accurately described the teacher represented by the application form, were to be circled and (b) a question to be answered on a 7-point scale (ranging from 1 "No appreciable degree" to 7 "Very high degree") as to the degree of interest the S had in seeing the applicant for a future interview if he had a position available.

The median scale value of the five personality-trait words circled was used as the first dependent measure. The second dependent measure was from the 7-point Likert-type scale.

Results

A multivariate analysis of variance was performed on personality-trait and likelihood of interview scores. It revealed a significant stimulus condition effect ($U = .2149$, $df = 2/1/58$, $p < .001$).

An ANOVA on each of the dependent measures, revealed that the mean for each dependent measure was significantly lower for Group 1, the negative stimulus group, than for Group 2, the positive stimulus group.

Thus, altering responses on a teacher's application form for information considered of little or no importance for effective teaching performance had a significant effect on both: (a) the evaluation of the teacher's personality-traits and (b) the likelihood of receiving a future interview with the administrator.

Discussion

The finding supports the theory that out-of-role behavior is an important determinant in the assessment of dispositional properties related to in-role behavior. Administrators felt as if they were most interested in information directly related to in-role behavior; yet this type of information apparently revealed very little about the teacher's personal qualities. It was the out-of-role behavior, operating in an environment of perceived freedom, that allowed the attribution process to operate. Out-of-role behavior was important

in providing information to the administrator; consequently, influencing the evaluation of the teacher's dispositional properties. Furthermore, it affected the likelihood of her receiving a future interview.

Hence, there is a return to the accountability problem. Administrators think that they are influenced by in-role behavior; yet it is out-of-role behavior which is influencing their evaluations and selections. The teacher is left not knowing how s/he is being evaluated. Thus, a gap is present between what is said to be important and what in actuality exists. In any accountability program, efforts must be made to lessen this gap. Administrators must first realize the contradiction and then either: (a) overtly state that out-of-role behavior is as important or more important than in-role behavior or (b) remove the information from the application forms entirely. Teachers deserve to know how they are being evaluated.

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